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ABSTRACT

In 1982-83, a study was conducted of Hmong communities in seven cities or regions across the United States. The study sought to describe general characteristics of the communities, to identify programs which serve the Hmong, and to assess how this group is doing in terms of employment, welfare dependency, the learning of English, and education. Data presented here mostly reflect findings from the Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota) area. It is reported that in the Twin Cities, unemployment is probably the most serious adjustment problem faced by the Hmong. Consequently, Hmong tend to rely on public assistance, despite their desire for independence. In terms of English language proficiency, the report states that this is another major and critical problem for the adult Hmong population in Minneapolis/St. Paul. On the other hand, young Hmong children in the public schools are proficient in English; out-of-school youth and young adults, however, need language and job training. Finally, social relations between the Hmong and the majority community are said to be strained in the Twin Cities. The report also summarizes data collected from the six other Hmong communities studied (Providence, Rhode Island; Fort Smith, Arkansas; Dallas/Forth Worth, Texas; Orange County, California; Portland, Oregon; and Fresno, California). These communities are compared and contrasted with that of the Twin Cities' Hmong. (GC)

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HMONG RESETTLEMENT

by Bruce T. Downing, Glenn Hendricks, Sarah Mason, and Douglas Olney

> "Life is very difficult for me. Language is the worst problem. Without English I cannot get a job."
>
> "Government cutbacks are heavier for the Hmong than nuclear weapons."
>
> "In Laos we were a minority people, but there was no crime, no prejudice, and we were never treated as badly as we are here."

These are comments from three Hmong in the Twin Cities who participated in a recent nationwide study assessing the Hmong resettlement experience in the United States. This study was conducted for the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory of Portland, Oregon, with the University of Minnesota and Lao Family Community, Inc., of Santa Ana, California as subcontractors. The University's share of the research was conducted by CURA's Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project (SARS).*

The Hmong in the Twin Cities and around the country are struggling to make a success of their new lives in America. Data were collected in seven communities across the country between December 1982 and April 1983. In each case, information was sought to describe the general characteristics of the Hmong community, to identify the programs which serve the Hmong, and to assess how the Hmong are doing in terms of employment, welfare dependency, the learning of English, and education.

Hmong experience was found to vary considerably from city to city. We present here some of the results of our study of the Twin Cities area followed by a brief comparison of Hmong experience in the six other communities studied. We have included data collected in the Hmong Community Survey conducted by SARS in the Twin Cities in August 1982, before the national study began. The survey sample included 305 Hmong households with 1,805 individuals.

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Hmong in the Twin Cities

The first Hmong families arrived in the Twin Cities in 1976. While the population grew slowly during the first two years, in 1978 it nearly tripled, and by June of 1981 the St. Paul-Minneapolis metropolitan area had become the largest urban concentration of Hmong in the United States. Figure 1 shows the rapid growth of the Hmong population in the Twin Cities. The numbers are based on knowledgeable estimates made largely by the state's Refugee Resettlement Office.

The rapid growth of the Twin Cities Hmong population was the result of both direct sponsorship and secondary migration from other parts of the United States. Among the early arrivals were some influential group leaders. They were treated with kindness and felt that Minnesota was a good place to be. They began persuading their relatives to come to Minnesota.

As more Hmong arrived in the state, Minnesota developed a reputation as a hospitable community. The Hmong felt that the cash assistance programs were good and that there were ample opportunities to learn English in English-as-a-second-language classes and to learn work skills in vocational training programs. As relatives who were sponsored around the country began talking about reuniting someplace, Minnesota became a favored choice. Secondary migrants then began to swell the local Hmong population, and these now nearly equal the number of Hmong who were directly sponsored to this area. Another factor in Hmong population growth is their high birthrate. Our survey in August 1982 indicated that 17 percent of the Hmong in the Twin Cities had been born in the United States.

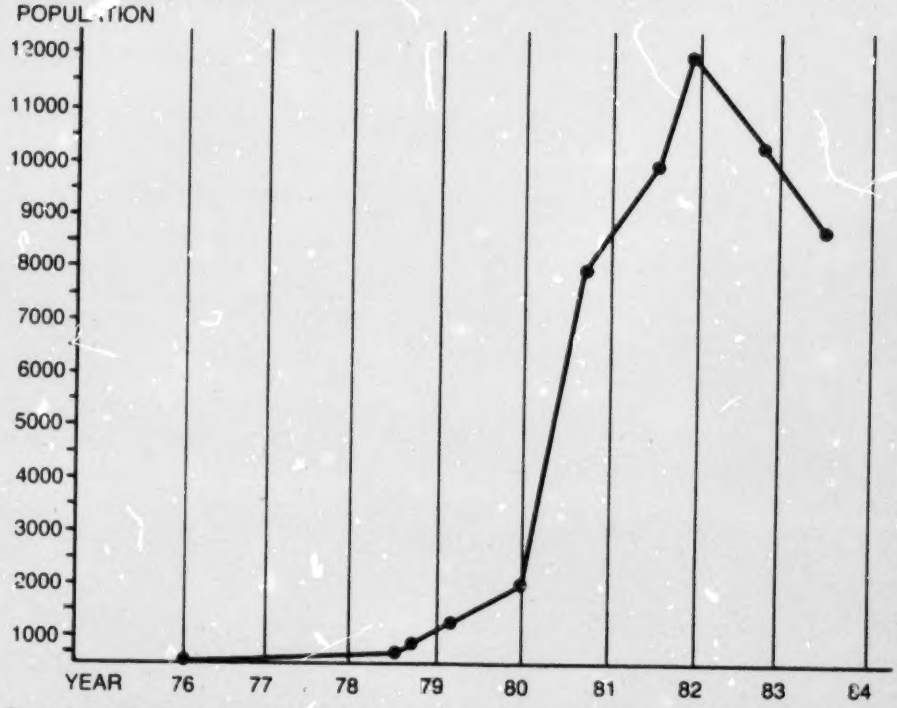
Since December of 1981, the Hmong population in the Twin Cities has declined substantially. The warmer climate in California and the possibility of being able to farm there has caused an out-migration that has lowered the Hmong population to possibly as few as 8,000.

During our discussions with household heads, 41 percent said that they had lived in some other locality in the United States prior to coming to Minnesota. The Hmong Community Survey in August 1982 revealed that 66 percent originally lived outside the Twin Cities and 40 percent first lived outside of Minnesota.

Employment

The Hmong Community Survey indicates that 29 percent of Hmong households in the Twin Cities have someone working, while only 3 percent have two or more employed. The average household size is probably six persons. Less than one-quarter of the household heads (22 percent) are working and of all the Hmong adults (those age eighteen or older) only 15 percent are employed. Figure 2 shows the percent employed in each age group.

Figure 1. HMONG POPULATION GROWTH IN THE TWIN CITIES



Sources: Refugee Resettlement Office, Department of Public Welfare, State of Minnesota and Hmong/Highland Lao Workgroup, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C.

The high unemployment rate in the Hmong community is perhaps the most serious problem of adjustment the Hmong face. But even those who do have employment should not necessarily be considered self-sufficient. Here is the story of one man we talked to:

> We have one problem, and that is not enough money. From the time we arrived in 1979 we had government help for quite a while, but since April of this year (1982) and up until now I don't have enough money because I don't earn very much and I have a large family. We are receiving nothing from the government now. I am working five hours a day. Since it adds up to just over 100 hours a month, I don't qualify for any help from the government, just the same as if I was working full-time. But with one hundred hours of work per month, at a pay rate of $5.19 an hour, I can earn only a little more than $500 a month. I don't have any medical benefits or insurance.

With large families to support, no health benefits, and often only one worker in a household, even full-time employment at or near the minimum wage often provides less income than a family needs, and less than they would receive if supported by public assistance.

Jobs that were reported as held by Hmong in the August 1982 Hmong Community Survey were: teacher—8 percent, interpreter—11 percent, day care—3 percent, maintenance—23 percent, factory—15 percent, laborer—8 percent, dishwasher—5 percent, other—8 percent, and summer jobs held by teenagers—19 percent. The employers of Hmong, we found to be generally happy with the performance of their Hmong employees on the job.* Some, particularly those employing Hmong in assembly work, said that they were among the best workers they had. They indicated that they would be willing to hire more Hmong if they were able to or if they were hiring at all. Language was considered a problem, but many employers successfully used Hmong work groups that included Hmong with better command of English who could translate for the others in their group.**

What are the barriers that keep Hmong from employment? The largest barrier is language. The data collected in the Hmong Community Survey suggest a clear relationship between command of the English language and employment (Figure 3). It must be kept in mind, however, that both English proficiency and employment increase with the length of time a Hmong has spent in the United States. No Hmong who had been in the United States less than eighteen months was working.

Inadequate command of English had also been an obstacle in obtaining the training needed preparatory to employment. Bilingual staff have simply not been available in many training programs.

Another barrier to employment, from the Hmong point of view, is the low pay offered

*See "Hmong in the Workplace," *CURA Reporter*, March 1982, pp. 1-5.

**See also the report *ESL/Employment Survey* prepared by Literacy 85 (1080 University Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104).

for the jobs they are able to find. Minimum wage is below the typical levels of welfare and usually does not include health benefits. The Hmong are very much aware of the high cost of health care, and some men have admitted to quitting their jobs when their wives were about to have a baby so the hospital costs would be covered by Medicaid.

The situation of Hmong women is even more difficult than that of the men when it comes to finding work. The Hmong Community Survey indicated that 23 percent of the men and 8 percent of the women were employed in August 1982. Hmong women report problems with English and lack of skills. At a meeting with Hmong women in one of St. Paul's public housing projects, we discussed employment for Hmong women. Lack of child care and lack of transportation were mentioned as barriers to attending English language classes and employment training classes. All agreed that child care would help them the most in enabling them to get jobs. Eleven out of fifteen said that they had small children at home and no one to take care of them. But these women also said that English classes and job training (such as the class they were attending in industrial sewing) were necessary in order for them to get jobs. All but one of these women (the interpreter) reported that they had had no education in Laos. Two-thirds of them had received some previous instruction in English; three were currently taking English classes.

Welfare Dependency

Since unemployment in the Hmong community is very high, the majority of Hmong families in the Twin Cities rely on some sort of public assistance either as a supplement or for their total support. This assistance is available in several forms: Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), AFDC, AFDC-U, AFDC-WIN, General Assistance (GA), food stamps, unemployment compensation, SSI, and the use of low-rent public housing. Eighty-five percent of the families surveyed in the August 1982 Hmong Community Survey were receiving some form of public assistance, and this did not include those who might be receiving only food stamps. Public housing has been a great help for many Hmong in the Twin Cities. In October of 1982 there were close to 600 Asian families in St. Paul public housing (48 percent of the total number of families).* Probably 90 percent of these families were Hmong.

It is clear that the Hmong in the Twin Cities are very dependent on public assistance and it has been fairly easy for them to obtain. When the federal refugee program cut eligibility for Refugee Cash Assistance from thirty-six months to eighteen months in May 1982, many refugees were sent letters telling them they would no longer receive RCA benefits under the refugee program and for various reasons they did not qualify for the state AFDC program. Since that time many Hmong have appealed that decision.

While there is a high rate of dependence on welfare, and a degree of maneuvering to stay on, almost all of the Hmong families we talked to agreed they would rather be working. The problem is finding an adequate job, one which pays a wage high enough to support a family and provides health benefits. Hmong spokespersons agreed that if supplemental income and Medicaid were available to those who worked full time on minimum wage jobs, more Hmong would be willing to take those jobs as they became available. Currently in Minnesota a family cannot receive AFDC if a family member works more than 100 hours a month. This may account for the large number (50 pecent) that we found in August 1982 who were working less than thirty hours a week.

Some Hmong have detected the negative attitudes Americans have about welfare and those on it, but as one man pointed out they have little choice:

> Many Americans say that the Hmong are lazy and they do not want to work. Hmong do not like to hear that. If the Hmong get a chance to have a job and then turn out to be lazy then Americans can say that. But the Hmong do not have jobs, no chance to work, so how can people say they are lazy? Everybody wants to work.

Others feel that because they fought for the United States in Laos, and were given promises of aid if the war went badly, they are owed something by the government. The government should be expected to find Hmong jobs, teach them English, or at least make sure they have enough money to survive. Many Hmong were very angry when refugee assistance was cut to eighteen months. They saw it as another in a growing string of broken promises. There is fear of more cuts. "Cutbacks are heavier for the Hmong than nuclear weapons," one said to us.

Hmong find it hard to be dependent. Along with the dependency is a growing sense of worthlessness and depression for once proud men who can now do nothing

*St. Paul Public Housing Agency.

Figure 2. EMPLOYED HMONG BY AGE GROUP

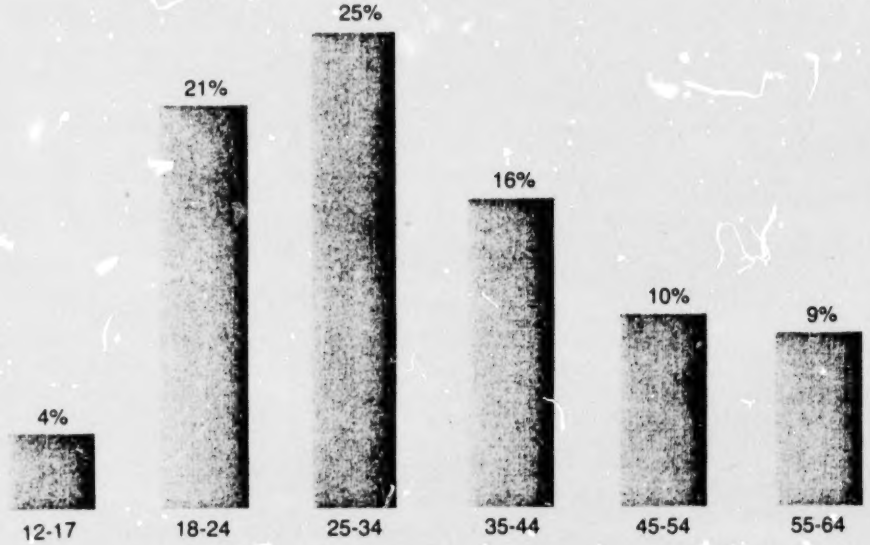
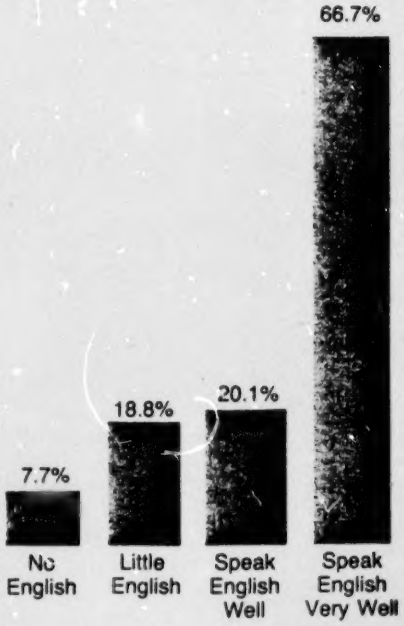


Figure 3. EMPLOYED HMONG BY SELF-RATED PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH



but stay home and sit. The depression feeds itself and people find it harder and harder to get out. The lack of enough money contributes to family stress. Some social workers report that more husbands and wives are fighting over money; marital disputes start with money problems, then move to other things.

Employment and welfare dependence are closely related and many Hmong households are able to combine various sources of income to survive. For example, one Hmong man lives with his wife, four children, father, and eighteen-year-old brother. They have several sources of income. This man works part-time as a health interpreter, earning between $250 and $300 a month and he is not eligible for AFDC. His father is over sixty-five and receives $280 a month from SSI. His brother receives $60 a month from GA. He pays $150 in rent for a four bedroom apartment in public housing. The eight-member household is treated as three families living together.

Learning English

Classes in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) have been quite readily available to the Hmong in the Twin Cities. At a Hmong National Planning Conference in July of 1981, one of the recommendations put forth by a Hmong man from another state was that every locality be required to have ESL programs as good as those in St. Paul. Professional ESL teachers have shown both dedication and ingenuity in their response to the challenge of adapting traditional ESL methods and materials to the needs of illiterate adult refugees. Hundreds of volunteers have given many thousands of hours of their time to doing what they can to help the Hmong refugees in their communities learn English.

Nevertheless, gaining command of the English language remains a major and critical problem for the Hmong. The story of one man's experience in trying to learn English may be typical of many.

> The ESL instruction was good as far as I'm concerned, but learning English is very hard for me because I never studied before, and I had to learn the ABCs and that was hard. The teacher would read first, and then we would follow. Also there was homework; we were supposed to fill in the missing words in the story, but I couldn't do it. The amount of time was not enough—two hours a day is not enough for people like me. Altogether, I had ESL classes for one year.
>
> On the job now I am not able to speak to the boss. I had to get help to fill out the application form, and some other people who already worked (where he works) helped me get the job. I still have trouble using English on the job. If I have an idea, something I want to say to the boss, I just don't say it because I don't know how. When the boss wants to tell me something, he usually shows me, rather than using words. In the place where I work (one of the few employers willing to hire Hmong who don't already speak English), there are twenty Hmong in two groups, but none of them knows English any better than I do.

In our meetings with household heads (all male) we found that only seven out of fifty-two (13 percent) had had instruction in English before coming to the United States. Forty-five had studied ESL in the United States: three for three months or less, twenty-one for four to six months, fourteen for seven to twelve months, and seven for more than one year. Almost 70 percent had had two hours of ESL instruction per day. As an indication of current competence in English, we asked a series of questions noted in Figure 4. In one group of twenty Hmong males we asked, "How well do you know English now?" Thirteen answered not at all; five said a little; two said they knew English well, and none said they knew English very well.

A major part of the problem for Hmong in learning English is their lack of literacy in any language and the absence of any kind of formal schooling. The Hmong Community Survey indicated that 74 percent of Hmong adults over age twelve in the Twin cities had no education in Laos: 55 percent of the men and 89 percent of the women. One prominent Hmong spokesperson explained the problem in noting changes he would like to see made in English classes:

> I would like to see some changes in the ESL programs. The way it is now people start teaching at the second step, instead of the first step. Many (Hmong) people really do not understand that the letters for "tabls" signify the object called "table." Teachers must begin with very basic A, B, C, as with children. Even when people have been here a long time they are not able to make the connection between writing and speaking. They need to understand this.

The teaching of basic literacy has been a challenge to all ESL programs. ESL teachers typically have had no training for teaching literacy. Many ESL programs are apparently struggling with this problem.

In addition to concern about the type of English training available, our survey indicated a concern about the length of time needed to really master the English language. A recent policy change has drastically affected ESL classes that serve the Hmong. The State of Minnesota has imposed a six-month limit on the length of time that refugees can receive free ESL instruction through the state's Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program. Yet, one of the most common complaints we heard, from family heads in group meetings and from individuals in their homes, concerned the duration and intensity of ESL courses. Essentially none of the uneducated Hmong with whom we spoke—through an interpreter, of necessity—felt that they had received sufficient instruction in English to meet their needs. The only exception were some older people who had given up, who do not expect ever to be able to hold a job or venture into American society on their own.

A resettlement worker who works very closely with the Hmong summarized the matter this way:

> Hmong say that their problems are no English and no jobs. Adult Hmong would go to school full time for English if they had the opportunity. They have a love for learning. There is the attitude that if they can speak English everything else will work out. They will get a job and many of their personal problems will be taken care of. They will be able to make it on their own. As it is now they cannot operate as individuals—they always need outside help to deal with the world.

Education

Children—Hmong children, because of the time spent in flight and in the refugee camps, were nearly as unlikely to have had formal education prior to resettlement in the United States as their parents. Of the 400 Southeast Asian students, mostly Hmong, who enrolled for the first time in all levels of the St. Paul school system during the school year 1979-80, the majority had never attended schools of any kind. Almost none of the children under 16 had studied English before coming to the U.S.

Nearly all Hmong children living in the Twin Cities have been enrolled in the public schools. St. Paul received a first influx of Hmong school children in 1976 and a rapid increase in their number in 1979-80. By 1981, Asian and Pacific Island students made up 10 percent of the total student enrollment, numbering 3,128. Eighty-five to ninety percent of these (about 2,500) were Hmong. In Minneapolis there were almost no Hmong children before the fall of 1979. Thereafter the Hmong population increased so rapidly that, for a time, the equivalent of one classful of Hmong stu-

Figure 4. HMONG COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH (35 male household heads)

How many of you are able to take a bus across town alone?	29%
How many have a driver's license?	46%
How many are able to fill out a job application?	23%
How many can handle a job interview?	29%
How many feel able to talk to American fellow employees?	17%
How many are able to work in an office, e.g. sell insurance?	11%

dents was enrolled per month. By December 1982, Minneapolis had 667 Hmong students.

Both school districts responded rapidly in establishing specific instructional programs for Hmong students under federal and state bilingual education grants. Both districts hired at least a few Hmong bilinguals as teachers and teacher's aides. Minneapolis has experimented with teaching Hmong literacy and developing Hmong language materials. St. Paul has experimented with using intensive English training in special centers prior to assigning students to regular schools. Both have used the approach of concentrating same-language students in selected schools so that language-specific instruction could be provided. Both have used English classes that students attend for part of each day, the amount of time varying with the student's ability to succeed in required subjects taught in mainstream classes.

There is evidence that the great majority of Hmong elementary students are learning English and using it. We found that young children are able to speak fluently on the phone, and they frequently speak English at home in talking about school and doing such things as math problems. The older children speak less fluently than their younger brothers and sisters. They do well in math classes but find it difficult to describe their boardwork to the rest of the class.

Youth—Young Hmong men and women who were of high school age or just beyond when they arrived in the United States have posed a particular challenge for the public schools. Many of these students not only did not speak English but had little or no previous formal education. The policy of the schools has been to admit them to high school up to the age of nineteen or twenty years. Placement has been made according to age, and, following the general practice of social promotion, Hmong students have been promoted from grade to grade without regard to academic accomplishment. A number of our informants mentioned this policy and questioned it because Hmong youth are "being graduated without having learned much."

School officials have recently become greatly concerned about another threat to the secondary education of Hmong youth. A large number of Hmong girls are getting married, becoming pregnant, and dropping out of school, often as early as age fifteen. Data from the St. Paul Public Schools indicate that as many as 80 percent of Hmong high school students there are married. Estimates of the number of Hmong girls dropping out of school prior to graduation now run as high as 90 percent. The schools provide support programs for pregnant teenagers and for school-age mothers designed to keep these girls in school. But only a few of the Hmong girls have participated in these programs.

A common problem for the Hmong youth graduating from high school is that they do not know what the possibilities for them are. They do not have the model of their parents to follow and they do not know the wide range of jobs and careers that can be pursued in American society, let alone the means to develop them. It appears that no one has made a sustained effort to help Twin Cities Hmong youth succeed in their studies and make realistic plans for higher education and employment.

Adults—A small number of exceptional Hmong young people have found their way into institutions of higher education in the Twin Cities. The University of Minnesota has enrolled Hmong students for several years. At present there are approximately forty, including just one woman, and an unknown number are attending other area colleges.

Education for Hmong adults has tended to emphasize "survival skills" and cultural orientation. Sessions in these areas have been included along with English language classes. Hmong instructors have offered classes in math, driver's training, and special terms associated with medical care, welfare, and automobiles. Instruction has been included in how to take the bus, how to make change, how to use a checking account, and how to ask directions.

Job training has been available for many of the young Hmong men, primarily through the excellent vocational technical schools operated by the St. Paul Public Schools, Ramsey County and Dakota County. These schools succeeded in training a number of Hmong for such jobs as machinist and welder. At first some found

jobs in the specialties for which they were trained. More recently, however, many who were employed have been laid off and many more have not found employment.

Despite the constant emphasis on survival skills along with English language instruction, many Hmong adults feel unable to cope by themselves in common situations. We were told that most Hmong adults remain bewildered by many aspects of American life. The complaint is not that the cultural orientation was not handled properly but that much more is needed. Hmong adults rely heavily on the communication skills, cultural knowledge, and even the judgment of adolescents when dealing with Americans and American institutions. According to many of the Hmong interviewed, this has the effect of undermining the role and authority of the parents. In many matters, adults are unable to make decisions or to solve problems because they don't understand what the options are. To remedy these problems many people, both Hmong and Americans, have recommended the organization of an extensive series of informational programs to be developed cooperatively by the Hmong mutual assistance organizations and various public agencies.

Community Relations

Because of their low economic status, the Hmong have been concentrated in low-income housing with other minorities and poor whites. There is some cause for concern about how the Hmong are getting along with the people who live around them. The Hmong moved into these neighborhoods in a time of decreasing public resources and high competition for housing. A situation of potential violence and resentment was created between the Hmong and the older residents who are each trying to get a piece of the shrinking pie.

The Hmong have experienced some problems with discrimination and harassment, but most American observers do not think the problems are very great. The Hmong who have had problems, on the other hand, are angry. Many feel that harassment is directed towards them just because they are Hmong, though others are not sure.

A major concern of the Hmong is that they sense they are not really wanted here. They feel that for this reason Americans will never accept them. A study of Hmong community relations in one neighborhood in Minneapolis during 1981 showed that the Hmong want to get to know their American neighbors and become involved in the community.* The optimism expressed in that study, however, has been tempered by the problems some have reported more recently.

In public housing areas in St. Paul there have been regular reports of vandalism, young people throwing rocks at Hmong, spitting, and name calling. These problems have been reported in other areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul as well. Because the Hmong live in areas where vandalism and other crime was high before they arrived, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the Hmong are being singled out as victims.

One indicator of the antagonism that Americans feel toward the Hmong are the rumors that continue to circulate about them. These rumors first surfaced over five years ago when the Hmong arrived here and despite repeated attempts at education through school programs, community programs, and newspaper articles, they persist. The rumors include: 1) the Hmong eat dogs 2) the government gives every Hmong family a free car, 3) the Hmong do not have to pay taxes for seven years, 4) the Hmong get higher welfare benefits than anyone else, 5) the Hmong get free apartments. None of these statements is true.

Some Americans have commented that the Hmong make easy victims. There is a tendency on the part of the Hmong not to fight back or complain when they have a problem. When the young Americans on the street find this out they taunt them further. It seems to have been a general policy of Hmong leadership to advise their people to keep to themselves, ignore taunts, and not cause trouble. The Hmong have made an effort to keep a low profile in the hope that problems with others would be minimized.

Many Hmong are expressing increasing frustration with the poor treatment they receive from Americans. One man commented, "In Laos we were a minority people, but there was no crime, no prejudice, and we were never treated as badly as we are here." There are Hmong, however, who do not feel the Americans treat them badly and generally have had good experiences here. Others simply do not interact with Americans.

For several years various community organizations have developed educational programs to help Americans learn more about the refugees and to bring the refugees and their neighbors together. The continued development of these kinds of programs is seen by many Americans and Hmong to be the best solution for problems of community tension and harassment. While we were conducting this study, many Hmong asked us to help teach Americans about the Hmong so that Americans will realize that they are good people, that they are not lazy but want to work, and that they hope in time to make their own contribution to American society.

Hmong in the Twin Cities today find themselves immersed in a completely alien society. The Hmong Community Survey in August asked them about their interest in returning to Laos (Table 5). The initial excitement that many Hmong felt about building a new life here has worn off and left instead a large amount of disillusionment. One man, who arrived in 1976, said that when he first arrived he was very excited about being in the United States. He felt this was where he could build a new life and forget about Laos. He had this attitude for about a year, but then he slowly became disillusioned. This man has done well materially, he speaks English and has a good job, but the longer he lives here the more uncomfortable he feels. Now, he said, he feels as if he is in jail.

Figure 5. HMONG INTEREST IN RETURNING TO LAOS

Is life better in the U.S. than Laos?	
yes	28%
no	65%
no answer	7%
Would you go back to Laos?	
yes	86%
no	7%
undecided	3%
no answer	4%
Do you think you will spend the rest of your life in the U.S.?	
yes	10%
no	18%
undecided	69%
no answer	3%

Hmong Experiences in Other Cities

One thing that stands out about Hmong resettlement in the Twin Cities is that the Hmong are the primary refugee group in the area and have been since 1979. Here the Hmong have received the most attention in the media, in volunteer efforts, and in the design of refugee programs. Most refugee programs have been developed with the special problems of the Hmong in mind. In many other cities the Hmong are lumped together with the Vietnamese or other Southeast Asians in the awareness of both the public and the local service agencies; in Minnesota there is a tendency in the opposite direction: to ignore the special characteristics and needs of Asian refugees who are not Hmong.

The public attention the Hmong receive in the Twin Cities continues to make the area an attractive place for the Hmong to stay even when there is little else to keep them here and much drawing them elsewhere.

Other communities observed in the Hmong Resettlement Study had different characteristics. Providence, Rhode Island, is a city that has long been a first stop for immigrants to this country. Providence has traditionally had a large number of unskilled jobs available, and when the Hmong first arrived they moved right into these jobs without English language or vocational training. Employment for the 2,500 Hmong

*See "The Hmong and Their Neighbors," *CURA Reporter*, January 1983, pp. 8-14.

in Providence has always been higher than in most communities, although the recent downturn in the economy has resulted in a number of layoffs. The cost of living is lower there than most cities—particularly for housing—and the public assistance program includes supplemental income for low income workers which encourages those with minimum wage jobs to stay on the job. Among the problems have been slow progress in English and some divisions within the Hmong community. The Hmong living there feel their biggest problem is crime, since available housing is in high-crime areas. On a subjective level, however, it appears that the Hmong in Providence are better off than in many other communities.

Both Dallas and Fort Smith have small Hmong communities of only 300 or so persons (Table 6) and both have a high employment rate—about 90 percent of the adult Hmong are employed. Only very limited public assistance is available in either location. The Hmong community in Fort Smith was begun in 1979 when a group of related families migrated there from around the country. They went to Fort Smith to get off welfare and establish a farming community. The climate and the land reminded them of Laos. They bought thirteen acres of land and have been clearing it and growing vegetables, but adequate employment has been very difficult to find. They spend most of their time in minimum wage jobs, trying to stay alive. Most receive no employee health benefits, and there is no low-cost medical care. They have been unable to accumulate any savings to help bring their dream of farming to reality and up until now they have received very little help from Americans. They moved to Fort Smith with great hope, but their success has been limited and their hope is waning.

The Hmong in Dallas have in general been more successful, not because of resettlement programs, which are very limited there, but because of the availability of assembly and other jobs that require little proficiency in English and offer relatively high wages and health benefits. Many have bought houses and there is a strong student organization that is working to make sure everyone completes high school and as many as possible go on to college. The refugee service providers in Dallas hardly know the Hmong exist, and the Hmong have had a hard time finding English language programs.

Orange County, in southern California, is the most similar to the Twin Cities of all the sites studied. The area was once a major center for Hmong, built by secondary migrants. But most of the Hmong who at first found jobs have been laid off and others who are not working found it too expensive to live there. In the past two years over half the Hmong have migrated into California's central valley, hoping to find cheaper housing and an opportunity to farm. For the 3,000 Hmong who remain, employment is very low and welfare dependency high. The mood there now is one of depression and frustration.

Figure 6. HMONG COMMUNITIES STUDIED

City	Size of Hmong Population
Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota	8,700
Providence, Rhode Island	2,500
Fort Smith, Arkansas	300
Dallas/Forth Worth, Texas	300
Orange County, California	3,000
Portland, Oregon	1,000
Fresno, California	10,000+

Until 1982, Portland was a fast growing secondary center for the Hmong with a population of over 4,000. But when the federal refugee regulations were changed and many people were cut from refugee assistance, a mass migration began to the central valley of California. Oregon does not have the liberal welfare benefits of Minnesota and California. Refugees found themselves without any means for support and moved to California seeking public assistance for survival and hoping for the opportunity to farm. The 1,000 Hmong who remain in Portland want to make it on their own, without public assistance, and are working hard to establish themselves.

The story that has captured the attention of Hmong leaders and Americans involved in resettlement in the past two years is the tremendous migration to Fresno and other cities in California's central valley (Sacramento, Stockton, Merced, Visalia). In 1981 there were only a handful of Hmong in Fresno; now there are over ten thousand. More than half the Hmong in the United States currently live in California. The Hmong have been attracted by the prospects of farming, the availability of housing, the mild climate, and the generous welfare benefits as well as the possibilities for family reunification. The Hmong influx has placed a tremendous burden on the local service providers who are struggling to keep pace with the situation. The Hmong moved to Fresno with the hope of betterment, but most are still unable to find employment. Only 7 percent of Hmong household heads in California are employed, compared to an average of 50 percent elsewhere. Welfare dependency is high. The striking thing about the Hmong in Fresno is the continuing mood of hope and anticipation—that perhaps this will be the place in the United States where the Hmong will be able to settle and make their

lives. But already some Hmong who had moved from the Twin Cities to Fresno are returning here.

The Hmong all across the country are attempting a variety of strategies in their attempts to resettle and build new lives in America. They are struggling with secondary migration, education, farming and employment and achieving a wide range of success. It is important to note that the Hmong are not a single homogenous group. There are some with the education and experience to be able to do well in the United States, and there are many others who struggle with English and the strangeness of American society and dream about going back to Laos. Some Hmong have actively fought against economic dependency, others have fallen back on government promises made to them in Laos—that in return for the Hmong's assistance in fighting the Communists the Americans would take care of them if things went badly. The Hmong still need help, but what they want most is to be shown how they can help themselves. They have strong leaders and they are an adaptable people; once they have seen how a program or idea can help them, they seem to embrace it. To find workable solutions for their problems of adaptation will continue to require patient cooperative efforts between American agencies, organizations, and individuals and the Hmong themselves.

Downing, Hendricks, Mason, and Olney are all associated with CURA's Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project and worked together on the Hmong Resettlement Study reported here. Bruce Downing, associate professor in linguistics at the University of Minnesota, is coordinator of the SARS Project. Glenn Hendricks is an anthropologist working in the International Student Advisor's Office. Sarah Mason is an historian who served as a consultant on this project. Douglas Olney is a graduate student in anthropology. SARS will be publishing the full site report for the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. To obtain a copy write or phone CURA (612/373-7833). The entire Hmong Resettlement Study (covering all seven Hmong communities studied) will also be published nationally by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Information about obtaining copies is available from ORR, 202/245-0480.

A major component of the resettlement study was an examination of economic development projects involving the Hmong. This part of the study was conducted by Simon Fass of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. Highlights from his report will be presented in an upcoming *CURA Reporter*.

Photos by Robert Friedman